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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, September 19-20, 2007

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Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that PM Ehud Olmert and Secretary of State
Condoleezza Rice will meet again this afternoon following Secretary

Rice's visit to Ramallah. Ha'aretz reported that Secretary Rice heard pessimistic messages from senior Israeli officials on the chance of having more than "joint statements" at the planned US-sponsored regional meeting. The newspaper reported that Vice PM Haim Ramon told Rice that there are still wide gaps and that it would be worthwhile to start with as general a declaration of principles as possible, and not a detailed agreement, so that the meeting succeeds. Ha'aretz reported that FM Tzipi Livni told Rice that expectations should be lowered. Ha'aretz quoted associates of PM Olmert as saying that he will deliver a "very important" diplomatic speech today to the members of Kadima's Council. The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Olmert is moving to keep Kadima united over the future of Jerusalem, and that Kadima members blasted Vice PM Haim Ramon's proposal for the city as "left of Meretz."

Yediot reported that jailed Fatah/Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti actually controls the Palestinian side of the negotiations and that the road to the Washington meeting "passes through his jail cell."

All media reported that on Wednesday the security cabinet voted unanimously to increase sanctions against the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, declaring the region "hostile territory." The media quoted Secretary Rice as saying at a press conference following her meeting

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with FM Tzipi Livni that Hamas "is indeed a hostile entity to the US as well. Secretary Rice added: "However, we will not abandon the innocent Palestinians in Gaza and indeed will make every effort to deal with their humanitarian needs." Livni said that the decision meant that "except for humanitarian needs, Israel will supply nothing further to the residents of Gaza." Hamas denounced the security cabinet's decision and the sanctions as a "declaration of war." Ha'aretz quoted Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum as saying: "We must unite the ranks to come together in the conflict with the cruel enemy. There will be implications in the long term. This is another attempt to force us to surrender to agreements."

Ha'aretz quoted a senior GOI official as saying that two different approaches were presented during the cabinet meeting. One was to cut off electricity in response to every rocket fired. This approach was found to be problematic in terms of international law because it would constitute collective punishment. The second approach, which the ministers accepted, was to compromise the ability of Hamas to govern in Gaza as the quality of life deteriorated. "We will reduce the amount of megawattage we provide to the Strip, and Hamas will have to decide whether to provide electricity to hospitals or weapons lathes," the official was quoted as saying. The cabinet also authorized the closure of crossings in response to rocket fire for up to 48 hours. PM Olmert was quoted as saying during the meeting that "the price of a military operation in Gaza is known to all, and in any case conditions are not ripe for this." Defense Minister Ehud Barak echoed this sentiment, adding "We will embark on action at the right time, not in order to let off steam." However, Barak also said that "every day that passes brings us closer to an operation in Gaza; we will decide on the means of an operation and the goals when the time comes." The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio quoted UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as saying on Wednesday that it would be illegal for Israel to cut the supply of fuel and electricity to the Gaza Strip.

Major media bannered a comment made last night on Israel-TV by opposition leader Knesset Member Binyamin Netanyahu that he was party to PM Ehud Olmert's decision to order an Israeli operation in Syria two weeks ago. The media said that this appears to be the first confirmation by a senior politician of foreign media reports on the matter. Yediot quoted officials in Olmert's bureau as saying that Netanyahu is a dangerous person who lacks judgment. Yediot quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad as saying on Wednesday that Syria is serious about returning to the peace process. Maariv quoted Israeli experts as saying that the crisis with Syria will not affect the negotiations.

Ha'aretz (Hebrew Ed.) led with comments made on Wednesday to the annual General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency by Gideon Frank, Director General of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission that Israel will not tolerate the development of weapons of mass destruction in the region. Media quoted Secretary Rice as saying on Wednesday that a diplomatic push to halt Iran's nuclear

program could work, but that "it has to have teeth." Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday Danny Gillerman, Israel's Ambassador to the UN, called on the US to prevent Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from coming to the opening of the UN General Assembly session next week.

Ha'aretz reported that the US has asked Israel to curtail its activities in Lebanon until the presidential elections there, scheduled to take place on September 25. US official conveyed to their Israeli counterparts that Israel should avoid any steps that may affect the domestic situation in Lebanon, referring specifically to overflights of Lebanon. Ha'aretz reported that in talks with senior Israeli officials in Jerusalem two weeks ago, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch stressed

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that the elections are a domestic Lebanese matter, and that it is important to avoid any action that may influence the elections. Ha'aretz quoted a senior Israeli official as saying on Wednesday that "in any case, Israel had no intention of intervening in Lebanon's elections. Ha'aretz quoted political sources in Jerusalem as saying on Tuesday that that Lebanese media reported "supersonic booms" over Sidon and Tyre, which they attributed to IAF jets. Ha'aretz also reported that that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Robert Danin told his Israeli counterparts in recent weeks that if Israel could provide the Lebanese government with data from launch-control computers used in the firing of cluster bombs in the summer of 2006, this would be considered a major gain for the Siniora government. The data could be used to locate areas over which the cluster bomb munitions were dispersed, as part of demining operations in southern Lebanon. Ha'aretz said that the US and Israel are not in agreement on whether any steps they take can bolster Siniora. The leading Israeli news Web site Ynet and Israel Radio reported that President Bush condemned the assassination of anti-Syrian Lebanese lawmaker Antoine Ghanem on Wednesday and said the US stood in solidarity with the Lebanese people against what he called an attempt by Syria and Iran to destabilize Lebanon.

Media reported that on Wednesday, for the second time in 24 hours, a Palestinian was killed in the city of Nablus as Israeli forces continued searching for a Hamas cell that is thought to be attempting to dispatch a suicide bomber on a mission inside Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday Israel barred students from leaving Gaza despite lengthy prior coordination. Ha'aretz said that three Israeli defense agencies each insist it was the other's decision.

Ha'aretz reported that the Federal Reserve Board's decision to slash the American funds rate by a whole half-percent "did not pass over Tel Aviv."

All media quoted police as saying on Wednesday that Jerusalem businessman Nir Barkat commissioned surveillance of Maj. Gen. Mickey Levy, the Israel Police representative in the US. Barkat denied any knowledge of the affair. Barkat, a Kadima activist, is a potential rival of Levy in next year's Jerusalem municipal elections.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, September 19-20, 2007:

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Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Rice's main message, which she reiterated during her meetings in Jerusalem on Wednesday, is that the summit cannot end without substantive achievements."

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/20): "What is currently happening is an Israeli attempt to bring down Condoleezza Rice and [Olmert's] Palestinian partner Abu Mazen from a tall tree."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized:
"Sometimes ... it seems as if Rice sees the Israeli-Palestinian situation in a vacuum, unaffected by events swirling around it."

Block Quotes:

II. "Just Another Empty Threat"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (9/20): "Wednesday's decision [to declare Gaza a 'hostile territory'] is an attempt by the government to throw a bone to residents of Sderot and other members of the public who are angry at the rocket attacks. But it does not contain any operational elements, only declarations -- namely, the usual threats against Hamas. The electricity supply will continue, at least until a Qassam rocket claims casualties.... The interesting aspect of the cabinet decision is its timing: It happened on the day US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in the region for talks with Olmert and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Once, Israel preferred not to adopt aggressive resolutions when senior American officials were visiting. But while Rice was not enthusiastic about the threat to impose sanctions on Gaza's civilian population, according to one Israeli official who met her, she chose not to make a big deal out of it. She has a more important goal: promoting the upcoming international peace summit in Washington as much as possible. Rice's main message, which she reiterated during her meetings in Jerusalem on Wednesday, is that the summit cannot end without substantive achievements."

II. "Arm-Wrestling on the Way to the Summit"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/20): "What is currently happening is an Israeli attempt to bring down Condoleezza Rice and [Olmert's] Palestinian partner Abu Mazen from a tall tree. A moment before he falls further into the honey trap of his intimate talks with Abu Mazen, Olmert is trying to escape, uttering numerous, varied pretexts.... Rice has her own agenda.... She will remain with the disaster of US foreign policy of which she was a senior partner in shaping.... Olmert's close associates assume that what is taking place in the talks is just part of the 'arm-wrestling to improve drafts that will appear in the joint statement.... The course pursued by Olmert is a correct expression of a declaration that negotiations over the final status between the sides will follow the Washington meeting.... A senior [Israeli official] says that the vision of two states living sided by side in peace will pass from the hands of George Bush to those of the next president of the US."

III. "Cart and Horse"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (9/20): "Sometimes ... it seems as if Rice sees the Israeli-Palestinian situation in a vacuum, unaffected by events swirling around it.... The Israeli cabinet decision [on Gaza], coupled with the reports operation in Syria two weeks ago, should serve as gentle reality checks. Peace efforts continue, but they do so, unfortunately, in a war context. What is more, it is impossible to rationally pursue such peace efforts without acknowledging which is the cart and which is the horse: negotiating peace or fighting the war.... Even if the regional conference were successful beyond expectations, any progress could only be considered a promissory note pending the outcome of the confrontation with Iran and its proxies and allies. By contrast, the moment a corner is turned in the conflict with Iran and it becomes clear that the mullahs will be stopped, then the possibilities for real peacemaking will be greatly enhanced."

JONES